

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY

LOOKING AT THE PAST TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The history of the City of Raleigh and earlier park planning efforts, are valuable background information to consider during any update to the Parks Plan. The City's original planners envisioned an "ideal" that, though modified through the years, has served as a guiding vision. The Raleigh of today may not bear an immediate resemblance to the City of 1792, but the City of Raleigh's core mission and commitment to its citizen's well-being and quality of life remains the same.

The history of Raleigh parks may be organized into four periods: The Formative Period (1792-1941); Consolidation and Refinement (1941-1970); The Expansion Era (1970-1981); and the Current Era (1981 – Present). During the formative period the philosophy and direction of the young parks program emerged, influenced by local visionaries and national trends. In the second period, the City became fully committed to a centrally organized municipal Park system with definite goals. The Expansion area was a period of refinement and adjustment to population pressure, city expansion, Federal mandates, and a subsequent increase both in parkland and park programs. The mission of the Parks Department also became more clear and its commitment to open space preservation was broadened and strengthened by the development of the Greenway System.

The Current Era finds Raleigh faced with the total funding responsibility of its burgeoning and successful programs and facilities. Federal funding assistance has diminished and the competition for limited fiscal resources tempers a renewed awareness of the urgent need for parks and open space, and new approaches in providing these services. The role of parks, while still traditionally the same in many respects is changing as a heightened awareness of environmental conservation, water quality protection and the effects if intensive urbanization influence affect park development and uses. The quality of, and stewardship of natural resources within parks are seen in this new century as a barometer of the commitment of the City to the quality of life of its citizens. In addition, the awareness of the benefits of meaningful public involvement has greatly expanded and become an integral part of park planning and design.

The following text provides a sketch of the influential trends and decisions which have brought Raleigh to its current philosophy and direction of parks and open space. The dateline highlights significant dates and events in the evolution of the present physical system.

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD

Raleigh has never been without parks. The original 400 acre city plan, laid out through 1,000 acres of woodland in 1792, included five public squares centered in a grid of streets. The General Assembly selected fellow Senator William Christmas, a surveyor, to lay out the lots and city streets of the Capital-to-be. William Christmas's visionary gift to the city was a modification of the plan of Philadelphia: A central site (Union Square) for the State Capitol and four axial streets, following the compass points, which divided the city into four quadrants or wards. The heart of each ward was a public square (Moore, Nash, Caswell, and Burke). Four lots were left open at the corners of the rectangular plan for "future parks, for children, flowers, trees and fountains." One one-half of the original 400 acres included was allocated for development; nearly 40 acres – 20% of the developed land – was reserved as open space.

The existing trees were spared on the original five squares – perhaps a decision of necessity – nevertheless, it made a powerful statement which was to become the foundation of Raleigh’s heritage of sensitivity to open space preservation.

The Christmas Plan, parks and all, served Raleigh well for nearly fifty years before the city began to grapple with new growth brought by railway service in 1840. The city pushed beyond the original boundaries during this decade and development (and convenience) claimed two of the original squares: Caswell Square become the site for a school for the deaf and Burke Square became the grounds of a new Governor’s mansion.

The vision for parkland never vanished, however, but in the 1860’s it resurfaced with a peculiar twist. Oakwood was designed as a Park Cemetery, having a dual function of a memorial park for the deceased and strolling and carriage grounds for the living. This cemetery became Raleigh’s first experiment with a multi-use, privately funded recreational and open space facility.

The Victorian Era touched Raleigh in both mood and fashion. The theory of “green relief” from urban chaos (hardly applicable by comparison to northeastern cities), promulgated by Frederick Law Olmstead, designer of Central Park in New York and the Boston parks system, encouraged citizens to donate land and finance the development of pleasure grounds or natural retreats.

Richard Stanhope Pullen responded with a gift of 69 acres in 1887 for an accessible pastoral retreat – a major public park. At the time the land was on the outskirts of the City and meant to be used as a get-away from bustling Victorian life in the downtown.

To this time, the Raleigh parks system had trickled together by philanthropy from individuals inspired by movements and ideals elsewhere in the nation. At the turn-of-the-century, however, nationwide influences stamped Raleigh’s budding park enthusiasm (and its Urban form) with visionary ideas. The Columbian Exposition of 1893 inspired the nation with the crusade that cities can be “beautiful and noble manifestations of civilization.” The aesthetic renaissance found specific expression in the landscaped boulevards of Glenwood and New Bern Avenues. Subtly, a shift in park philosophy simultaneously gained popularity. “Reform Parks” beckoned the entire citizenry to recreational opportunities – not solely pastoral retreats – and the notion of a system of parks, rather than individual parks, began to gain favor.

Parks also became an amenity of fine residential neighborhoods developed for an emerging middle class whose homes were linked to downtown by trolley service. The transportation service carried citizens to “Street railway” owned parks at the edge of town. Bloomsbury Park, near Lassiter Mill, Brookside Park north of Oakwood, and Pullen Park fit this category of open space. The new residential subdivision called Cameron Park set a model tone by arranging streets around natural drainage ways, leaving the creeks as neighborhood open space.

The evolution of the parks system’s direction roared in the twenties. In short order, the City obtained an annual appropriation for playground supervisor, and the Mayor and City Board appointed a City Parks Commission. This at-large group of prominent citizens surged forward with plans for the development of a parks system and the maintenance and beautification of the current landholdings. The decade closed with the General Assembly granting the new commission the responsibility for Union, Nash and Moore Squares and the donation of land for Edna Metz Wells Nature Park by eminent North Carolina State College botanist, Dr. B. W. Wells.

The following depression decade brought increased recreation time to all citizens. In response to this demand, the General Assembly established the Raleigh Recreation Commission to oversee supervised

recreation. In turn, a Raleigh Recreation Department was created and placed under the Division of Public Works. The ambition of this original organization is outlined in their 1938 annual report which contained some prescient goals. Among them were: “(1) that leadership was as important as facilities, (2) schools should be used as community centers, (3) public tennis and badminton courts were important, (4) careful consideration of new leisure activities and the design of the required facilities, (5) increased funding, (6) recreation areas to be set aside in new public housing projects, and, finally (7) that Raleigh’s School Board, the Raleigh Recreation Commission, the Raleigh Park Commission, City officials, the Housing Board and other organizations should work together to survey and plan for the future long term growth in public recreation.”

The immediate result of the 1938 report was the development of more facilities in existing parks. This would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the Federal Works Progress Administration which provided salaries and funding for capital recreation components.

The thirties concluded the formative years of Raleigh’s Park system. A philosophy of service and need was firmly established, and, more importantly, recreation and parks were officially institutionalized as an accepted province of local government action (albeit with Federal assistance).

CONSOLIDATION AND REFINEMENT

The mission of Parks and Recreation was spread through several agencies in 1940. In 1941, Raleigh began a program of centralization. The City Commissioners combined the Parks Commission and the Recreation Commission into the Recreation and Park Commission. The following year Fallon Park was dedicated to the city. By 1950, and with the redesignation of the Commission to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the system included 189 acres in the form of 16 parks, 12 playgrounds and two recreation centers.

With its institutional structure intact, Raleigh embarked upon a mission of refinement and redefinition of its goals, by hiring a recreational consultant, in 1950. The Master Plan that was prepared provided an exhaustive methodology of using citizen surveys and growth trends to mold the goals of both parks and recreation elements into an ideal acquisition and development program. This Plan, though not executed completely, solidified the thinking and planning efforts which have since become a standard approach. Though quickly outpaced by growth, the Master Plan completed the refinement of the park’s mission. In addition to increased parkland and improved facilities in existing park property, the plan’s legacy includes defined standards for determining park needs and a methodology of planning.

THE EXPANSION ERA

In 1960, a new study was completed with a 20-year projection of parks needs based on nationally accepted standards. This study launched the footrace of the Expansion Era, where the need for parks would be constantly refined in an urgent effort to adapt to rapid urbanization which claimed desirable park sites more rapidly than the city could mobilize to secure them. In spite of this competition, Raleigh was on the brink of its greatest park growth in 1969, spurred by citizen demand and the realization that quick action must be taken in tandem with growth pressure. In this year Raleigh published “Raleigh, The Park With a City In It,” an open space plan for the pending decade. Old concepts of drainage systems and natural areas as preservation were dusted off and re-worked in the form of the “Greenway concept.” The early visions of a parkway along Crabtree Creek leap-frogged to the Neuse River; roadway beautification, historic preservation, regional facilities and even a municipal golf course became valid and valued objectives to meet recreation and park goals. New concepts of land acquisition through subdivision control tied land preservation to development.

Conservation easements, planned unit developments, joint school/park programs, and private/public ventures, gained credibility as methods of trying to stay even with the development boom. Federal funds supplemented these programs substantially – with more than one million dollars in matching funds. More than 20 parks, targeted in areas of anticipated growth, entered the system during this decade.

The Greenway concept, borne of a 1972 study entitled Capital Areas Greenway, linked floodway development and flood control issues brought about by development, to a system of open space preserves and recreational trails. In 1973 the City Council created a fifteen member Raleigh Greenway Commission to oversee the fledgling program.

These concepts and strategies crystallized in a final refinement of the parks system in the 1979 Comprehensive Plan for the City of Raleigh. An element of that plan refined goals and specified standards, which were further used to target future park acquisition. The policies of this plan were used in planning and development of park programs up to the withdrawal of Federal funds in 1981.

THE CURRENT ERA

Since 1982 Raleigh has become solely responsible for the acquisition, funding, and development of its Parks Program. Intense competition for valuable Federal funds has become the norm and the City must continually look for creative ways in which to obtain funding. Due to accelerated growth, the continued exploration of creative means to finance future park acquisition and development still persists. As a result, the City's Facility Fee Program was designed to collect fees from developers to directly assist with the purchase of new parklands and to bolster park development in pace with the City's expansion.

Another vital element of parks and recreation funding in recent decades has been the use of publicly-supported and funded bond referendums. In 1984, the City committed itself to its future parks program with the passage of an \$8 million bond program. In 1987, a \$10 million bond was approved and used to develop a year-round aquatics facility, softball complex and three new major parks. This bond was followed by \$3.5 million approved to build a baseball stadium. Since then, through bond referendums, citizens have encouraged continued growth of a wide variety of parks and recreation facilities. Citizens desire to continue to be represented through the City Council appointed Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board. Today the Raleigh Parks and Recreation Department is comprised of 152 parks, 19 staffed community centers, eight unstaffed community centers, two arts centers, four lakes, 43 miles of greenway trails, eight swimming pools, two historic carousels, a multi-million dollar sports/recreation/entertainment facility, two performing arts theaters, two historic and renovated home sites, and numerous special facilities. In 1995, citizens of Raleigh passed a \$28 million bond referendum, and, in 2000, a \$16 million bond for parks system improvements, investments and land acquisition.

Other programs and restructurings stand out in the Current Era. In 1984, the Urban Forestry Program was established to oversee tree management within the City. Two years later, the Greenway Commission, which oversaw Raleigh's Greenway Program, was incorporated into the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. The council-appointed citizens oversight committee is now entitled the Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board. The City has also made great strides towards protecting the quality of the Neuse River and surrounding lands when it received \$2.85 million in funding from the State's Clean Water Management Trust Fund in 1998. Significant acquisitions along the River will assist in accomplishing the Neuse River Regional Park Master Plan, a plan adopted in 1996 for 18 miles of the River. In addition to the annual Capital Improvement Program and bond

funds, the City has received \$550,000 in grants from Wake County to pursue open space acquisitions on the Honeycutt Creek corridor and Lake Johnson.

It is from this foundation laid by the progressive notions and persistent actions of six decades that Raleigh now seeks to continue growing and improving. With a renewed commitment, the City is now seeking improved funding tools in order to continue providing high quality parks and recreational opportunities for its citizens. This plan re-focuses on the value of parkland as green infrastructure with the intent to retain the earlier concept for Raleigh as “The Park with a City in it.”

PAST SUCCESSES...THE FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

This Parks Plan includes many recommendations that will serve as a guide to City park and recreation planners as they continue to develop a high quality, well maintained, and easily accessible parks and recreation system. The City has made some great strides during the past decade since the last Parks Plan. The momentum created by these can now serve as the foundation for accomplishing the recommendations in this Parks Plan. Key areas of success, chosen from among the many, are highlighted below:

Regional Parks

The 1990 Parks Plan recommended that the City look to providing large-scale park facilities that would offer a broad range of recreational activities or contain a specific focus that would serve the entire community as well as surrounding municipalities. Past successes and future opportunities are listed below.

- Regional Park past successes
 - Lake Johnson
 - Walnut Creek Softball Complex
 - Pullen Park
 - Lake Wheeler
- Future Regional Park opportunities-
 - Forest Ridge Park (natural resource program emphasis)
 - Little River/Eastern Wake County Park (historical or agricultural emphasis)
 - Triangle Aquatic Center

Capital Area Greenway

The Capital Area Greenway system has enjoyed overwhelming support as it has begun to develop into a truly regional amenity. The City is committed to completing vital connections of the system and to continued expansion. Current initiatives include the recommendation to develop greenway trails at a rate of two miles per year and to expand the Greenway corridor width. This new requirement would include the lands on either side of the stream top of bank at a distance of 100', or the entire delineated floodplain area on either side of the stream centerline, whichever distance is greater. Along the Neuse River, this recommendation is expanded to a 150' buffer or the entire floodplain, whichever is greater.

Greenway connections are currently proposed to provide links to:

- Lake Johnson
- Walnut Creek Softball Complex
- Pullen Park
- Lake Wheeler
- Umstead State Park
- Lake Crabtree County Park via Umstead State Park
- Falls Lake State Recreation Area,
- The Town of Cary Greenway system

Future possibilities include:

- Links to Lakes Wheeler and Benson through the Swift Creek watershed via public lands around Historic Yates Mill County Park
- Links to the Little River Reservoir via roads and utility easements.

Opportunities should be explored to incorporate other trail types, where appropriate for individual sites and programs of facilities to accommodate users of all abilities, nature observation programs and a variety of recreational activities such as jogging, and bicycling and in-line skating.

Partnerships with the Wake County Public School System

Another recommendation of the 1990 Parks Plan is to seek out opportunities to partner with the Wake County Public School System in the development of park facilities. As land availability decreases and fiscal pressures continue to be present, partnerships remain a very attractive and practical option to serving the leisure needs of the community. The City is recommended to build upon several successful partnerships with the school system and to continue a close working relationship to ensure that the needs of both parties are served.

Past successes include:

- Summer rental of facilities to provide recreational programs
- Purchase and development of Baileywick Community Park (16 acre school site, 50 acre park site, joint ownership of park land with Wake County)

- Brier Creek Park/School site (City and WCPSS jointly purchased a 20 ac. site to develop plans for an Elementary School/Park).

Neuse River Master Plan – 1996

The Neuse River Master Plan is another prime example of positive momentum borne out of a recommendation in the 1990 plan. This master plan was a vital first step in both the protection and responsible use of one of Raleigh's most recognizable and important natural features. Elements of this plan include:

- A continuous acquisition program, utilizing strategic partnerships, that will ultimately add 490 acres along the river to the existing 750 acres of park and greenway lands;
- A cooperation with Wake County's efforts to identify and conserve natural and cultural heritage as well as provide recreation access along the River;
- Recommendations to connect the Walnut and Crabtree Creek Greenways to the Neuse River;
- Recommendations of additional boating opportunities to expand the Neuse River Canoe Trail, including a possible whitewater recreation area below Falls Lake dam,
- Strategies for continued efforts by the City to inform, educate and encourage its citizens regarding the importance of protecting water quality, limiting stormwater runoff, and promoting environmental stewardship.
- Undertaken as an effort through the Clean Water Management Trust Fund

Successful initiatives as a result of this plan:

- Canoe and greenway development in conjunction with the Clean Water Mgmt. Trust Fund
- Arrival and destination park developments including Anderson Point, Buffalo Road Athletic Park
- Future development of Horseshoe Farm, Alvis Farm and Milburnie Parks.
- Advance acquisition of open space and greenway corridor along the Neuse River, especially south of Poole Road to the County line.

Strategic Bond Referendums

The City has enjoyed overwhelming support on two bond issues for parks and recreation. This \$44 million of public funding has brought about significant acquisition in advance of development as well as the development of exceptional facilities including:

1995 Bond (\$27.79 million)

- Two new community centers (Lake Lynn and Laurel Hills);
- New Top Green neighborhood center in South Park neighborhood;
- New pool construction, and renovation and expansion of the Chavis Park Community Center;
- Additional four softball fields at Walnut Creek Softball Complex; and
- New gymnasium at Tarboro Road Community Center.

2000 Bond (\$16 million)

- Phase 2 of Baileywick Road Community Park;
- New neighborhood center at Peach Road Park;
- Phase one implementation of the Pullen Park Master Plan; and
- Numerous park development projects currently in the planning stages.

A look toward the future

These successful initiatives, borne out of a positive long-range vision for the future of Raleigh's parks and recreation facilities, serve as stepping stones toward continued future success. This plan acknowledges these successes and seeks out new areas in which the City is recommended to focus its efforts. These recommendations, discussed previously in this chapter include:

- Placing a priority on strategic land acquisition
- Creating delineated areas within park master plans that ensure a balance of active recreation, passive recreation, and natural areas within parks.
- Planning for flexibility within and between parks in order to allow optimal use of park lands
- A focus on environmental stewardship and the ecological health of the City
- Improved public involvement in the planning of park and recreation facilities and increased awareness of recreational opportunities
- Collaboration with area agencies, municipalities and organizations in an effort to seek creative ways in which to fulfill the broad spectrum of leisure needs of the citizens of Raleigh

DATELINE OF RALEIGH PARKS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
1792	The original City Plan provides five wooded squares
1848	Caswell and Burke Squares appropriated for development
1869	Oakwood, a “Park Cemetery,” established
1887	Richard Stanhope Pullen donated 69 acre park
1900’s	“Trolley” Parks, Bloomsbury, Brookside, and Pullen
1910	Cameron Park development
1921, 22, 23	Park funding of \$6,000, \$9,000 and \$8,000 respectively
1925	Playground Supervisor hired for \$1,500
1929	City granted Union, Nash and Moore Squares and Edna Metz Wells Nature Park
1935	Raleigh Recreation Commission established Raleigh Recreation Department established
1935-39	Work Progress Administration assists city efforts
1937	Chavis Park dedicated
1941	Park and Recreation Commissions merged
1942	Fallon Park dedicated
1948	Recreation and Park Commission renamed the Park and Recreation Advisory Board
1950	Chavis Park acquired from state.
1951	Raleigh Jaycees sponsor Jaycee Park
1951-1960	Roberts, Lions, Kiwanis sponsor parks for the City
1960	30 parks, 23 playgrounds and 5 recreational centers on 370 acres
1960	New parks study completed
1960	Lake Wheeler Park; Community Center opened at Jaycee, Lions and Chavis Park
1964	Land purchase for Lake Johnson Park
1969	Hymettus Woods Nature Preserve donated to City
1969	Publication of “Raleigh, Park With a City In It”
1972	“Capital Area Greenway” study
1973	Greenway Commission formed
1979	Raleigh Comprehensive Plan completed
1981	\$8,000,000 bond package approved for Parks
1984	Greenway Commission merged with Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to become Parks, Recreation and Greenway Advisory Board
1984	Urban Forestry Program established
1987	\$10,000,000 bond program approved
1988	Urban Form Plan adopted
1995	\$28,000,000 bond program approved
1996	Neuse River Master Plan adopted
1998	Protecting the Neuse River corridor receives \$2.85 million in state funding
2000	\$16,000,000 bond program approved